

PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY

TESTIMONY

EXECUTIVE BUDGET:
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, FY 2023
JOINT HEARING, NEW YORK STATE:
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

February 7, 2022

Delivered by Dr. James Davis, President
Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Good afternoon, Senate Chairpersons Krueger and Stavisky, Assembly Chairpersons Weinstein and Glick. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify today and for supporting public higher education.

The PSC comes before this committee in a very different situation than last year. We are entering year three of an international pandemic that continues to impact CUNY communities. Vaccines have lessened the toll on New Yorkers, thankfully, but CUNY students were among those hardest hit by COVID early in the pandemic. The low-income communities in which they live were disproportionately affected, and tragically so. They lost family members and jobs, and their connection to the campuses diminished as classes went remote. PSC members have worked tirelessly and skillfully to keep the University running, often without clear system-wide guidance from the CUNY administration, resulting in serious health and safety concerns and course cancellations that impede students' academic progress and leave adjunct faculty without income and, for some, without health insurance. Thank you all for standing by our side during this time.

CUNY students, faculty and staff have persevered during this pandemic. But its effects on our university remain profound and destabilizing. Even today, instructors routinely hear from students coping with the death of a family member or friend.

Remote instruction on the scale we have experienced over the last two years undermines engagement and makes retention of students especially difficult. Students without adequate space to study or dependable technology have really struggled. Many have not returned to classes.

We believe CUNY students are generally better served by in-person instruction, advising, and counseling. Yet some students are hesitant to return to in-person classes while COVID is still a threat. Others, facing work and family obligations, a lack of affordable, dependable childcare and long, costly commutes are asking for online alternatives to in-person courses. These and other factors have suppressed enrollment at many colleges.

CUNY's varying response to low enrollment has left many PSC members concerned for their employment, and for some adjuncts their access to health insurance should their classes be canceled. We urge CUNY not to cancel classes. Doing so leaves adjunct faculty without expected income and undermines students' ability to complete credits they need to graduate on time.

It adds insult to injury when library and computer lab hours are cut because there is not enough staff to keep them open

To reverse the current enrollment trend and continue providing a high-quality education, we must furnish the services students deserve and need in traumatic times. CUNY students have a distinctive profile:

- Over 80 percent of incoming CUNY undergraduates are New York City high school graduates.
- Half of CUNY students come from households with annual incomes below \$30,000, and 36% have reported food insecurity.
- 80% are people of color.
- 44% are in the first generation of their families to attend college.
- 13% are supporting children.
- 35% are foreign-born.¹

Investment in CUNY students, faculty and staff, and the communities that we serve will pay dividends for the state. According to a [March 2021 report from the New York City Comptroller](#), tax dollars in CUNY are a wise investment:

- Nearly 80% of CUNY graduates stay in New York.
- CUNY graduates working in New York State earned a combined \$57 billion annually (\$67,000 on average) in 2019, \$28.6 billion more than they would have earned without a post-secondary degree.
- CUNY graduates working in New York State paid an estimated \$4.2 billion in state income taxes in 2019.
- CUNY graduates represent 10% of the private workforce in New York State.

In 2020 the Brookings Institution listed 12 CUNY campuses that propelled its students toward the [greatest upward mobility to the middle class](#).

Executive Budget: A Strong Start on Reversing Years of Austerity Funding for Public Higher Education

¹ Sources: A Profile of Undergraduates at CUNY Senior and Community Colleges: Fall 2019; CUNY Celebrates First-Generation College Students For Their Courage, Tenacity And Drive To Succeed, November 8, 2019; New York City's 2021 MMR; enrollment by race and ethnicity, fall 2019; Student Experience Survey 2018

In December, 1,000 PSC members, CUNY students, community allies and elected officials took to the streets of Queens, marching from LaGuardia Community College to CUNY Law School to declare that this is the year for a New Deal for CUNY.

We knew at the march as we know now, that after years of budgets that did not do justice to CUNY's Black and brown students, low-income communities, and overburdened workers, there is wind at the back of New York State's great institutions of public higher education. The fiscal crisis of the last two years has receded and New York has a strong budget surplus. Governor Hochul is acting decisively to begin reversing the years of austerity funding for CUNY, New York's most powerful force for economic mobility for low-income New Yorkers, immigrants, and students of color.

The Governor has committed to an increase of \$1.5 billion in new funding for CUNY and SUNY over the next five years. She has proposed new investments in full-time faculty, opportunity programs, and childcare facilities. Her capital budget plan recognizes the desperate need for funding to repair or replace CUNY buildings, making them sustainable and safe places to work and learn. These increases, which in some cases represent the largest investments in more than a decade, are essential and we applaud them. We also recognize that the chairs and members of these committees have advocated for years for reforms and investments that appear in this Executive Budget. Notable investments in CUNY in the proposed budget include:

- Approximately \$120 million in new programmatic and related funding:
 - \$53 million for 540 new full-time faculty
 - \$59.6 million closes the TAP gap two years sooner than expected
 - \$3.4 million for the SEEK program
 - \$4.8 million for expansion of childcare centers (\$3.6 million for Senior Colleges and \$1.2 Community Colleges)
- Expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program
 - \$150 million for CUNY and SUNY to provide support for part-time students
 - \$5 million to restore TAP for incarcerated individuals
- \$3.5 million for the School of Labor and Urban Studies, stabilizing executive funding for the newest CUNY school.
- By holding community colleges harmless for enrollment declines, the budget prevents a \$35 million reduction in base aid.

Requested Legislative Additions to the Executive Budget

Many of the investments outlined in the Executive Budget align with the priorities identified in the New Deal for CUNY ([S4461/A5843](#)). This legislation, supported by the CUNY Rising Alliance and introduced by Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assembly Member Karines Reyes, is a \$1.7 billion, five-year framework for reversing decades of disinvestment in CUNY.

The bill, which is endorsed by some of New York's [most prominent labor leaders](#) and the [Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus](#), currently has 65 legislative co-sponsors. It seeks to restore CUNY as a tuition-free institution for undergraduates. It would also set minimum staff-to-student ratios for full-time faculty, academic advisors and mental health counselors, establish pay parity for adjunct faculty, and rebuild CUNY's aging infrastructure.

The PSC calls on the legislature to pass the New Deal for CUNY, and urges you to enact a final budget that will begin to fund the New Deal in FY 2023. To that end, we request that you improve upon the Executive Budget's investment in CUNY in the following ways:

1. An additional \$253.9 million in operating aid from the legislature
 - a. \$39.1 million for CUNY community colleges to make 2018-2019 the reference year in the hold harmless provision (\$20.7 million), and to fund a \$300 per-FTE base aid increase (\$18.4 million).
 - b. \$78.9 million to hire 171 mental health counselors and 372 academic advisors.
 - c. \$135.9 million to hire an additional 1,385 full time faculty, (for a total of 1,925, including the 540 new full-time lines provided in the Executive Budget).
2. Pass the New Deal for CUNY (S4461/A5843) (cost for FY23 covered by request above)
 - a. Establish minimum ratio of full-time faculty to students, increasing to 65:1000 by year five of the Governor's plan for CUNY and SUNY.
 - b. Establish minimum ratios of 1:1000 mental health counselors to students and 1:250 academic advisors to students.
 - c. Commit to an undergraduate first dollar tuition-free model at all CUNY colleges
 - i. For \$284 million New York State can make CUNY community colleges free this year.

- ii. ND4C would make all CUNY fully free in year two.

Why is it time for A New Deal for CUNY?

Between 1990 and 2021, per-full-time equivalent student state operating aid to CUNY senior colleges declined 38%, adjusted for inflation; since 2008 it declined 18%. The result has been rising tuition, diminished facilities, unmanageable caseloads for mental health counselors, academic advisors stretched thin, a two-tiered labor system that depends on underpaid adjunct faculty, and a severe shortage of full-time faculty.

That CUNY remained such a powerful source of knowledge creation, opportunity and economic mobility during this era of disinvestment is a testament to our faculty, staff and students. PSC members feel a deep commitment to CUNY's mission to serve "the whole people" of New York. CUNY students are driven to succeed.

We are sincerely appreciative of the attention public higher education received in Governor Hochul's Executive Budget. Her five-year plan starting with this budget is a springboard to fulfilling the New Deal for CUNY. Now, the CUNY community needs the legislature to seize this unique political moment to get us over the finish line and realize the New Deal for CUNY.

Elements of the New Deal for CUNY

CUNY needs for more faculty; Black and brown students have less access to faculty than white students

Increase full-time faculty to a ratio of 65:1000 and professionalize adjunct pay at both the senior and community colleges. This would allow CUNY to hire 5,774 new full-time faculty.

Cost for FY 2023: Executive Budget + \$135M

Total cost for five-year phase in: \$542M

Imagine a university with more than 253,000 students and over 11,000 full-time faculty². That was CUNY in 1975. In contrast, in 2020, there were almost 4,000 fewer full-time faculty with even more students. Making matters worse, too much of the teaching burden now falls on the shoulders of 12,000 adjunct faculty, who, as of last spring,

² Statement by Chancellor Matthew Goldstein regarding the New York State Commission on Higher Education's Preliminary Report of Findings and Recommendations, Dec 17, 2007.
<https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/news/cuny-chancellor-praises-higher-ed-commission/>

teach almost 60% of undergraduate courses. This budget is an opportunity to challenge the precariousness that prevails in higher education to the detriment of students and faculty alike.

Hiring new full-time faculty is also a matter of racial justice. A report by the CUNY University Faculty Senate, and detailed in a November 2021 op-ed by Assembly Member Karines Reyes in the [Daily News](#), explains that students of color have less access to full-time faculty than white students across New York State's public senior colleges.

In 2003, both CUNY and SUNY maintained overall ratios of 43 full-time faculty members to 1,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students in the four-year colleges, a number already below national norms for public universities. By 2019, the ratio at SUNY had increased to 49, while the ratio at CUNY dropped to 34.

Public four-year colleges that serve significant proportions of Black and brown students have lower ratios of full-time faculty to students than their counterpart colleges serving student bodies that are predominantly white. This trend exists in both systems, but it disproportionately affects CUNY. We are relying not only on the executive branch, with the plan to fund 540 more faculty in the executive budget, but also on the legislature to address this stark illustration of institutional racism. CUNY students need a dramatic increase in the number of full-time faculty at their colleges.

CUNY students need more professional staff, advisors and mental health counselors

171 additional mental health counselors and 372 academic advisors

Cost for FY 2023: \$78.9 million

Total cost for five-year phase in: \$78.9 million

Last year's \$1 million appropriation from the legislature for mental health counselors was welcomed, but students need more permanent access to counselors, and unfortunately the Executive Budget provided no new funding specifically for counselors or advisors. CUNY needs our legislators to address this need that cannot wait another year.

CUNY students, more than many others, need advisors to help them navigate the labyrinth that is a large university system, as many are the first in their family to attend college. Academic advisors support and expand students' knowledge in their fields of

study, providing essential guidance to keep them on track to timely graduation. Yet on some campuses, advisors have caseloads of more than 1,000 students.

Our society's mental health crisis is not confined to colleges, but CUNY students have been at the center of the pandemic. CUNY's student-to-mental health counselor ratio is 2,700:1, far worse than the national recommendation of 1,000:1.³ Currently, CUNY is patching together tele-health services with many part-time counselors, also funded with federal pandemic relief, because it does not have an adequate baseline of funds to hire permanent counselors.

We urge you to address these gaps in the Executive Budget by providing funding for 171 mental health counselors and 372 academic advisors.

Make CUNY free again

Eliminate undergraduate tuition and fees at senior and community colleges

Cost for FY 2023: \$284 million, if New York makes CUNY community college free

Total cost for five-year phase in: \$1.1 billion

New York's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) is among the largest state financial aid programs in the nation, benefiting both private- and public-college students. Roughly 60 percent of CUNY students receive federal Pell grants. And a very small percentage of CUNY students qualify for New York's last-dollar Excelsior Scholarship.

The state's funding model for public higher education has depended on rising tuition, robust financial aid, and essentially flat operating support. Lawmakers and advocates have worked to close the gaps in the financial aid system. But our university systems have been starved of resources under the current model, while tuition has increased and student debt has remained a burden for many families. New York's free-tuition program, Excelsior, is a last-dollar scholarship that comes with significant strings attached.

There is a better way. New York should commit to a first dollar tuition-free model at all CUNY colleges. It is worth noting that every one of CUNY's 13 Nobel laureate alumni attended tuition-free.

Starting with the 2023-2024 academic year, (Fiscal Year 2024), the New Deal for CUNY mandates the elimination of all tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students with

³ The International Accreditation of Counseling Services

time-frames stipulated for degree completion, and CUNY would receive full reimbursement for the tuition amounts.

Public higher education advocates were thrilled to see the focus on free community college in President Biden's Build Back Better plan. While national politics unfortunately hindered that plan, it created an opportunity for New York State to lead the way. New York could eliminate tuition and fees at CUNY community colleges for just \$284 million.

There is a shortage of nurses and teachers right now. Students in these fields should find a home at CUNY without worrying about tuition and fees. Let's give them the ability to graduate on time and enter the workforce without debt.

Freed of the burden of tuition, CUNY students collectively would have more than \$1 billion of additional spending power to boost the economy. Funding public higher education is not only the ethical thing to do, it is a wise fiscal investment of resources. If a free CUNY was good enough for the majority white population in our university's first century, surely it is good enough for the students of color who are the majority of our population today.

Capital budget: Building repairs and sustainable development

Invest in repairs and ensure a safe working and learning environment

Total cost for five-year phase in: \$5.6 billion

Decades of underinvestment led to deteriorated buildings. The result is massive overcrowding on many campuses, inadequate heating, cooling and ventilation, leaky roofs, broken plumbing, dangerous pavements, failure to replace major electrical components, and other hazards. All of this was unacceptable before COVID, but in a pandemic, updated and working ventilation systems are a matter of life and death.

As outlined in the governor's budget, we must address the shortage of workers in various industries. Our classrooms, libraries and laboratories must be equipped to strengthen New York's workforce, especially in the fields of education, the sciences and healthcare. Investing in sustainable facilities will have the added benefits of mitigating climate change and creating high-paying construction jobs.

This is a unique moment that can't be missed

Fiscal and political circumstances have changed for CUNY. For too long, the PSC fought against cuts in the executive budget that in some years were draconian.

This is the year to invest in CUNY, and it doesn't come a minute too soon for our beloved University and our state.

CUNY students are worthy of a transformative investment in their futures. PSC members deserve a vibrant, safe and healthy workplace. Laborers in the construction industry need the jobs that long-delayed capital investments in CUNY can bring. And the people of New York are worthy of a renewed commitment to the public good.

We urge you to ask your colleagues to join you, support the People's University, and fund a New Deal for CUNY now.

Thank you.